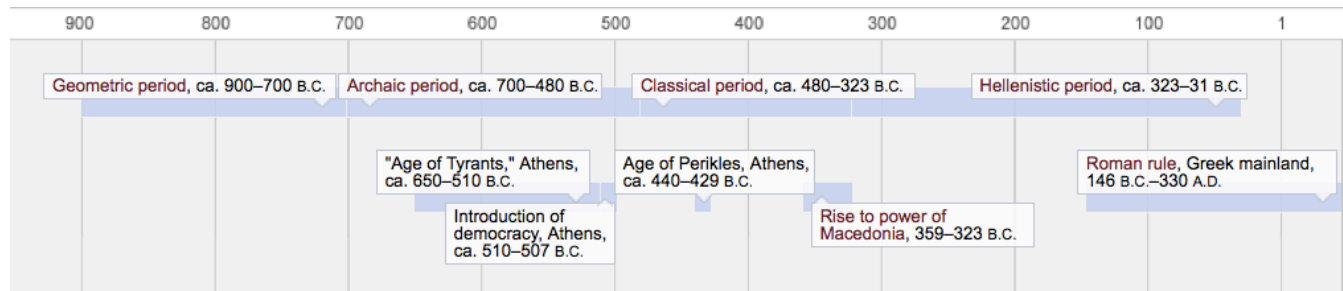


THREE PERIODS OF ANCIENT GREEK ART

The ideals of Greek art are considered by historians to be the foundation of Western civilization and to have touched literally all aspects of modern western culture. The history of ancient Greek art mainly in the form of sculpture is composed of roughly three periods: the Archaic, the Classical, and the Hellenistic. The Archaic is rather stiff and primitive; the Classical becomes more sophisticated and realistic; and the Hellenistic becomes flowery and highly decorative.



ARCHAIC

In the Archaic period of Greek art (800–500 BCE), sculptures were placed on pedestals lining the way to the entrance to a main temple or for marking graves. The typical statue is of either a male or female figure assuming a rather stiff pose. Male statues are called *kouroi* (simply meaning "young men") and represent gods, warriors, and athletes. The female statues are called *korai* and depict clothed priestesses, goddesses, and nymphs. Each typically has a thin-lipped Archaic smile. The statues show the influence of Egyptian art, and do not portray a figure in realistic full action.

CLASSICAL

During this period [500–323 BC], Greece reaches the height of economic success and cultural and artistic splendor. Rivalry between Athens, Sparta, Corinth, Thebes, and Syracuse leads to much fighting and bloodshed. Gone is the dreamy Archaic smile from the sculptures.

The Classical period of Ancient Greece produced some of the most exquisite sculptures the world has ever seen. The art of the Classical Greek style is characterized by freedom of movement and freedom of expression. It celebrates humankind as an independent being. Artists seek to represent ideal beauty, and the human body is studied for its natural beauty and artists replace the stiffness of the human figure from the Archaic period with a free-flowing form more true to life. The most significant change is the counterbalance, or s-curve, of the body, known as *contrapposto*. One foot comes forward so that one leg is relaxed and the other bears the weight of the body; the pose is much more naturalistic.

In the art of Greece during the Classical period the characteristic smile of the Archaic sculpture is replaced by a solemn facial expression. Logic and reason are the dominant human qualities even during the most dramatic situations.

This is the period that influenced the rise of the Renaissance when Italian scholars, writers, and artists experienced a rebirth ("renaissance") of classical values after the Middle Ages. The Classical period is considered the golden age for the arts, literature, philosophy, and politics and its principles continue to influence western civilization today.

HELLENISTIC

The Hellenistic period occurred from the third to the first centuries B.C. in the times that spring up after Alexander the Great's conquests. A new reality emerges in Greek sculpture. Instead of depicting ideals such as logic and suppressed emotion or perfect beauty, the artists explore reality. For instance, "the

Boxer" shows the boxer's bleeding knuckles after the fight. Humane themes such as childhood, old age, ugliness, and suffering are now of interest. Artists expand their work with dramatic poses and emotions, sweeping lines, and high contrasts of light and shadow. The conventions of the Classical period give way to this new experimentation and freedom that let artists explore subjects from different points of view.

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